THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS (SHRI NAMO NARAIN MEENA): (a) and ((b) Central Government has not received any proposal from the Maharashtra Government for environmental clearance of TV Mumbai (Middle-Vaitarana) water supply project. However Municipal Corporation of Greater Mumbai (MCGM) forwarded the project report in respect of IV Mumbai (Middle-Vaitarana) water supply project to the Ministry of Urban Development in the Government of India seeking financial assistance from the Wold Bank. MCGM was asked to obtain prior clearances from Central Water Commission and the Ministry of Environment and Forests before submission to the world bank for financial assistance.

(c) As per the information received from the Government of Maharashtra, the original estimated cost of the IV Mumbai (Middle-Vaitarana) water supply project in 1992 and the revised cost estimate in 2002 are Rs. 570 crores and Rs. 1250 crores respectively.

Licence to sandalwood oil distillation units

3928. SHRIMATI BIMBA RAI.KAR: Will the Minister of ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS be pleased to state:

(a) whether the Central Empowered Committee constituted by the Supreme Court has called for the cancellation of all licences to sandalwood oil distillation units;

(b) whether sandalwood oil factories are being run under licence granted under various Act like Boilers Act, Factories Act and Panchayat Act, etc.; and

(c) whether the Court has observed that the unhindered functioning of these units was possible only with the political patronage and total in action of the State Government functionaries?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT AN D FORESTS (SHRI NAMO NARAIN MEENA): (a) No, Sir. However, 23 sandalwood factories functioning illegally in the State of Kerala were ordered to be closed down vide Government of Kerala's GO. (MS) No. 17/ 2005/F&WLD dated 09.02.2005 on the report of the Central Empowered Committee. Now, no sandal distillation units are functioning in the State of Kerala.

(b) Yes, Sir.

(c) No, Sir, While considering certain bail applications of accused in offenses related to sandalwood, the Hon'ble High Court of Kerala in the order dated 08.02.2005, had *inter alia,* observed that 'if some of the averments of the bail application, if accepted, will establish the nexus between the sandalwood mafia and politicians.'

LMMC for conservation of Biodiversity

3929. SHRI KALRAJ MISHRA: Will the Minister of ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS be pleased to state:

(a) whether India and 16 other Like-Minded Megadiverse Countries (LMMC) have decided to cooperate with each other to develop strategies for conservation of biodiversity;

(b) if so, the countries with which such cooperation agreement/ understanding has been reached and the terms of the cooperation agreement, and the specific area of biodiversity aimed; and

(c) the mutual benefits arising therefrom?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS (SHRI NAMO NARAIN MEENA): (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) The seventeen countries which are rich in biological diversity and associated traditional knowledge and have formed the group known as the Like-Minded Megadiverse Countries (LMMC) are: Bolivia, Brazil, China, Colombia, Costa Rica, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ecuador, India, Indonesia, Kenya, Madagascar, Malaysia, Mexico, Peru, Philippines, South Africa, and Venezuela. The Group has agreed to join efforts for effectively negotiating the development of an international regime on access to genetic resources and benefit sharing arising out of the use of these resources, under the aegis of the Convention on Biological Diversity.

(c) Formation of the Group of the LMMCs has provided the member countries an effective platform to negotiate with the developed countries, the terms and conditions for ensuring fair and equitable sharing of benefits as envisaged under the Convention on Biological Diversity.